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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 001078

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PHUM ECON CO
SUBJECT: DCM MEETS WITH VICE-MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Milton K. Drucker
for reason 1.4 (b).

DCM Begins Series of Regular Meeting with MFA Vice-Minister

¶1. (C) On January 31, DCM met with GOC Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Camilo Reyes. Reyes had asked for the meeting as the first of what he hopes will be regular monthly meetings to discuss key bilateral issues and areas of mutual concern. In response to questions from the DCM, Reyes touched on three main issues: (1) Venezuela, (2) President Uribe's upcoming trip to Europe, and (3) GOC negotiations with the G-24 over a joint declaration to be issued in Cartagena on February 4.

Venezuela

¶2. (C) Reyes observed that the public standoff with Venezuela appeared to be nearing its end, and commended the Peruvian Foreign Minister and the Colombian diplomatic mission in Havana for their contributions to defusing tensions. Regular discussions by phone with Venezuela's Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs and the January 27 face-to-face meeting between the Colombian and Venezuelan Foreign Ministers in Lima had facilitated a private rapprochement that preceded recent conciliatory statements by the GOC and GOV and set the groundwork for Uribe's February 3 visit to Venezuela. Reyes said Colombian commerce with Venezuela -- which amounts to USD 2.5 billion a year, excluding petroleum -- should have restarted already. Reyes noted that the proposed gas pipeline between the Colombian department of La Guajira and the Venezuelan port of Maracaibo did not have much traction, although he noted that the Colombian Ministry of Mines and Energy continued to consider it important.

Uribe's Upcoming Visit to Europe

¶3. (C) Reyes said President Uribe's February 7-11 trip to Europe would include visits to Brussels (EU), Paris, and Madrid. According to Reyes, although the GOC enjoys good relations with the current administrations in France and Madrid -- what Colombians refer as "gobiernos" -- the Government must reduce the ignorance and misunderstanding of Colombia that prevails throughout the legislatures, judicial systems, and civil society of these nations. Reyes noted President Uribe's conviction that cooperation between Colombia and the EU and its individual members states could be much better. Specifically, Uribe plans to propose that the EU consider entering into an association compact with the Andean Community, which would improve commercial opportunities for Colombia and other Andean nations. Reyes also noted the problems the new European tariff on "dollar" bananas would cause if left unchanged.

¶4. (C) In Spain, where Uribe will make an official state visit, the President will emphasize improvements in Colombia's internal situation resulting from the successful implementation of the Democratic Security Policy. Reyes emphasized that Spain is Colombia's greatest European ally in multilateral institutions, and that Uribe would attempt to use Spain to make inroads with the EU.

¶5. (C) Uribe will meet in Paris with French President Chirac. Reyes noted that the Uribe Administration has good relations with France, Colombia's largest European direct foreign investor. However, bilateral relations have been severely

complicated by the Ingrid Betancourt situation, which has become an issue of internal political importance in France, thereby distorting and conditioning the bilateral relationship.

G-24

16. (C) Reyes spoke with pride about the GOC's success in negotiating with representatives of the G-24 a satisfactory joint declaration for the February 2-4 international donor's conference in Cartagena. He observed, however, that the declaration's negotiation was complicated by the extreme politicization of the G-24 forum and the excessive influence within the G-24 process of local NGOs hostile to Uribe and his policies.

Upcoming Visits to Colombia

17. (SBU) DCM concluded the meeting by briefing Reyes on several important U.S. visits to Colombia scheduled for the next few weeks, including the February 13-15 visit of Under Secretary Grossman and the February 20-23 visit of Florida

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Governor Jeb Bush with a commercial delegation representing at least 45 companies.
WOOD

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